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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000060

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2017

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SUBJECT: THE DISTAFF SIDE OF AK LEADERSHIP: ROOM FOR MORE
THAN ONE STYLE OF SCARF

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d)

11. (C) Summary: During a small dinner hosted by Justice and Development Party (AKP) "networker" Mutlu Alkan, State Minister for Women's and Children's issues Nimet Cubukcu expressed confidence in the ruling party's ability to succeed in this year's parliamentary elections, while lamenting the continued low numbers of women candidates. She spoke warmly and positively of her encounters with "real Americans" in the United States while expressing serious concern over the spread of "negative (American) cultural influences," including fast food-induced obesity, "Coca-cola addiction" and pornography. Perhaps underscoring the fundamental differences in our political and cultural environments, she questioned why the USG did not "require Hollywood" to present a more balanced and positive view of the American people. All in all, however, the conversation would have sounded familiar to many suburban American parents of all stripes. Indeed, Cubukcu and Alkan themselves personify the social and cultural diversity found within AKP. End summary.

12. (C) Consulate staff joined Cubukcu at a small dinner hosted January 13 by AKP Istanbul Province Women's Branch Chairman Mutlu Alkan, a former IV grantee. From outward appearances, Cubukcu and Alkan reflected the diversity within their party: Alkan wore a headscarf tightly knotted around the neck in a style that has become identified with AKP; Cubukcu, who was an attorney prior to entering politics six years ago, wore a conservative suit with scarf loosely gathered around her neck in a classically western way. Styles aside, both were confident, straightforward, disciplined and energetic interlocutors with a passion for political activism at a grass-roots level that is the AKP's strongsuit.

13. (C) Noting AKP's goal to further promote women's participation in the Turkish political process, Alkan and Cubukcu described to us a new initiative to open a Women's Center in Istanbul. The party intends to partner with a yet to be selected university to open a research facility that would collect information related to the status of women in Turkey. Cubukcu said the AKP supports in principle efforts by some Turkish NGOs to promote quotas requiring party tickets to include a minimum percentage of women, but added that quotas, alone, are not sufficient. "Parties will always find a way to work around these quotas," she lamented.

14. (C) Cubukcu and Alkan appeared particularly confident about AKP prospects in the November parliamentary elections. Alkan noted AKP had received 42% of the vote in Istanbul in the 2002 elections and believed that 50% is a realistic goal for 2007. Cubukcu confidently asserted AKP's superiority to its rivals in the practice of "grass roots" politics: it knows exactly in which neighborhoods it is strong and where it is weak due to its door-to-door, person-to-person style of

politicking; it also knows which neighborhoods include immigrants from which regions of Turkey, and thus could, in effect, conduct "regional political outreach" from within Istanbul. Cubukcu said AKP had done a good job serving the country but had not successfully publicized its activities. The party needs to focus on this prior to the elections, she stressed.

15. (C) Turning to U.S.-Turkish relations, Cubukcu opined that sending people to the United States is the strongest diplomatic tool available to the USG. Alkan agreed, noting that when she was an IV program participant, she was struck by America's diversity and by the tolerance Americans have for this diversity. Cubukcu added, however, that American "fast food" and "addiction to Coca-cola" seemed to be leading to epidemic obesity beyond its borders. Both women disparaged the U.S.'s (particularly Hollywood's) export of violent movies and pornography, suggesting that the Internet and satellite television have "normalized" such images by transmitting them throughout the world and, consequently, de-sensitized people to their immorality. Cubukcu asked, with apparent sincerity, why the U.S. government did not restrict Hollywood from producing violent and sexually explicit films that offered such inaccurate images of America to the world. Note: We later sent Minister Cubukcu information and resources regarding US DOJ programs to combat child pornography.

16. (C) Comment: Belying what one might expect from a party rooted in Islam, both Cubukcu and Alkan are modern female politicians. Their views and living situations are similar to those of many professional American women. Both are married with children and Cubukcu commutes to see her husband who lives and works outside of Ankara. Alkan, who appears to

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exercise influence beyond her nominal party position and youth, is the principal bread winner in her family and her husband clearly plays a supportive role at home with their infant daughter. (Note: At a previous engagement for the Consul General at Alkan's home, Interior Minister Aksu dropped by and stayed for some time, relating to Alkan quite informally. End note.) Despite strong leadership in its women's auxiliary, AKP continues to lack female parliamentary candidates and admittedly, both Cubukcu and Alkan are assigned to responsibilities associated with women's issues. While the two may not define the character of AKP, they do showcase the broad net that the party casts for its membership. End comment.

JONES